CLAIMS

1. A computer-assisted method of negotiating a contract over a computer network between a first negotiator and a second negotiator, comprising the steps of:

(1) displaying on a first computer screen a plurality of predefined contract provisions, each relating to a contract provision and including an agree/defer selector for the first negotiator; a first dialogue box into which the first negotiator can enter text; an agree/defer selector for the second negotiator; and a second dialogue box into which the second negotiator can enter text;

(2) receiving for each of the plurality of predefined contract provisions an agree/defer selection from the first negotiator;

(3) displaying on a second computer screen the plurality of predefined contract provisions, including any agree/defer selections made by the first negotiator; the first dialogue box; the agree/defer selector for the second negotiator, and the second dialog box;

(4) receiving for each of the plurality of predefined contract provisions an agree/defer selection from the second negotiator; and

(5) storing the agree/defer selections made by the first and second negotiators in a computer memory.

2. The computer-assisted method of claim 1, further comprising the step of preventing the first negotiator from entering text into the second dialogue box.

3. The computer-assisted method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

(6) in response to detecting that the first and second negotiators have entered identical text in each respective first and second dialogue boxes, permitting the first and second negotiators to select "agree" for the agree/defer selector, and otherwise inhibiting such selection.

4. The computer-assisted method of claim 1, further comprising the step of repeating steps (1) and (3) until the first and second negotiator have selected either agree or defer for each of the plurality of contract provisions.

5. The computer-assisted method of claim 1, further comprising the step of, in steps (1) and (2), displaying a first response box into which the first negotiator can enter text, and a second response box into which the second negotiator can enter text, the method further comprising the step of:

(6) in response to detecting that the first and second negotiators have entered identical text in each respective first and second response box, permitting the first and second negotiators to select "agree" for the agree/defer selector, and otherwise inhibiting such selection.

6. The computer-assisted method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

(6) in response to detecting that the second negotiator has entered text in the second dialogue box, determining whether the first negotiator has indicated acceptance of the text in the second dialogue box and, in response to such acceptance, permitting the first negotiator to select an "agree" selector, and otherwise inhibiting such selection.

7. The computer-assisted method of claim 6, further comprising the step of:

(7) in response to detecting that the first negotiator has entered text in the first dialogue box, determining whether the second negotiator has indicated acceptance of the text in the first dialogue box and, in response to such acceptance, permitting the first negotiator to select an "agree" selector, and otherwise inhibiting such selection.

8. The computer-assisted method of claim 7, wherein steps (6) and (7) comprise the step of determining whether each respective negotiator has entered text into a response box.

9. The computer-assisted method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

(6) in response to detecting that the first and second negotiators have entered different text in each respective first and second dialogue box for a particular contract provision, generating a message highlighting a discrepancy with respect to that particular contract provision.

10. A computer-assisted method of negotiating a contract over a computer network, comprising the steps of:

(1) in a computer, receiving from a first contract negotiator information designating, for each of a plurality of contract phases, information identifying a person or entity having authority to negotiate a corresponding contract phase, and a role played by that person or entity;

(2) permitting each person or entity having authority for negotiating each respective contract phase to log into the computer and to negotiate with a second negotiator using the computer, wherein the computer displays on a first computer screen a plurality of predefined contract provisions, each relating to a contract provision contained within one of the corresponding contract phases and including an agree/defer selector for a first negotiator and an

agree/defer selector for a second negotiator; and

(3) denying persons or entities not authorized in step (1) from negotiating with the second negotiator.

11. The computer-implemented method of claim 10, further comprising the step of transmitting messages between negotiators by indicating the role played by each respective negotiator.

12. The computer-implemented method of claim 10, further comprising the step of limiting access by each person or entity authorized in step (1) to only certain actions within each contract phase.

13. The computer-implemented method of claim 10, wherein step (1) comprises the step of authorizing a third-party service provider to negotiate concerning one or more of the contract provisions.

14. The computer-implemented method of claim 10, further comprising the step of allowing the first negotiator to override negotiation choices made by a person or entity authorized in step (1).

15. A computer-assisted method of negotiating a transaction over a computer network between a first negotiator and a second negotiator, comprising the steps of:

(1) displaying on a first computer screen a plurality of predefined transaction provisions, each relating to a transaction provision and including an agree/defer selector for the first negotiator and an agree/defer selector for the second negotiator;

(2) receiving for each of the plurality of predefined transaction provisions an agree/defer selection from the first negotiator;

(3) displaying on a second computer screen the plurality of predefined transaction provisions, including any agree/defer selections made by the first negotiator;

(4) receiving for each of the plurality of predefined transaction provisions an agree/defer selection from the second negotiator;

(5) storing the agree/defer selections made by the first and second negotiators in a computer memory;

(6) repeating steps (1) through (5) for a plurality of different transactions; and

(7) generating a summary report that includes, for each of the plurality of different transactions, information identifying the contract and a current contact person for each respective transaction, and, in response to selecting one of the current contact persons, generating a message to the one current contact person.

5   16. The computer-assisted method of claim 15, wherein step (7) comprises the step of including on the summary report a current contact person that has been authorized to act on behalf of one of the negotiators.

17. The computer-assisted method of claim 15, wherein step (7) comprises the step of including on the summary report a current contact person that is identified by a role played in 10   negotiating the transactions.

18. The computer-assisted method of claim 17, wherein step (7) comprises the step of displaying a menu of choices including a plurality of current contacts identified by respective roles played in negotiating the transaction.

19. The computer-assisted method of claim 15, further comprising the step of generating 15   a second summary report that includes, for one of the plurality of different transactions, a plurality of phases into which the one transaction has been partitioned, and displaying different current contact persons for at least two of the plurality of phases.

20. A computer-assisted method of negotiating a contract over a computer network between a first negotiator and a second negotiator, comprising the steps of:

20   (1) displaying on a first computer screen a plurality of predefined contract provisions, each relating to a contract provision and including an agree/defer selector for the first negotiator and an agree/defer selector for the second negotiator;

(2) receiving for each of the plurality of predefined contract provisions an agree/defer selection from the first negotiator;

25   (3) displaying on a second computer screen the plurality of predefined contract provisions, including any agree/defer selections made by the first negotiator;

(4) receiving for each of the plurality of predefined contract provisions an agree/defer selection from the second negotiator;

(5) storing the agree/defer selections made by the first and second negotiators in a

computer memory; and

(6) providing a dual-messaging function that permits members of a transaction team authorized to act on behalf of one of the negotiators to transmit messages to other members of the transaction team that are recorded in a message log that can be viewed by all members of the transaction team, and permits members of the transaction team to selectively transmit messages to other members of the transaction team that are not recorded in the message log, such that they cannot be viewed by all members of the transaction team.

21. A computer-assisted method of negotiating a contract over a computer network between a first negotiator and a second negotiator, comprising the steps of:

(1) displaying on a first computer screen a plurality of predefined contract provisions, each relating to a contract provision and including an agree/defer selector for the first negotiator and an agree/defer selector for the second negotiator;

(2) receiving for each of the plurality of predefined contract provisions an agree/defer selection from the first negotiator;

(3) displaying on a second computer screen the plurality of predefined contract provisions, including any agree/defer selections made by the first negotiator;

(4) receiving for each of the plurality of predefined contract provisions an agree/defer selection from the second negotiator;

(5) storing the agree/defer selections made by the first and second negotiators in a computer memory; and

(6) providing a customization function that permits one of the negotiators to, prior to step (1), selectively exclude one or more of the predetermined agreement provisions from being displayed in steps (1) and (3).

22. A computer-assisted method of negotiating a real estate sale transaction, comprising the steps of:

(1) displaying on a computer screen a plurality of sale provisions and a plurality of predefined actions associated with each sale provision, wherein the plurality of sale provisions are associated with a first phase of a sale negotiation;

(2) for each of a plurality of negotiators to the sale transaction, detecting a selection of

one of the plurality of predefined actions associated with each sale provision; and

(3) for each sale provision, determining whether each of the plurality of negotiators has selected the same associated predefined action and, if so, storing in the computer an indication of the associated sale provision as an agreed provision and, if not, deferring non-agreed sale provisions to a later phase of the sale negotiation.

23. The computer-assisted method of claim 22, wherein step (2) comprises the step of detecting selection of either an AGREE choice or a DEFER choice for each sale provision.

24. The computer-assisted method of claim 22, wherein steps (1) and (2) are performed at a prospective purchaser's computer during a first time period, and wherein steps (1) and (2) are performed at a prospective seller's computer during a second time period.

25. The computer-assisted method of claim 22, wherein step (2) further comprises the step of receiving from at least one of the negotiators a numerical value pertaining to at least one of the sale provisions.

26. The computer-assisted method of claim 25, further comprising the step of converting in a computer the numerical value from a first unit of measure to a second unit of measure and displaying the second unit of measure.

27. The computer-assisted method of claim 25, further comprising the step of converting in a computer the numerical value from a first unit of currency to a second unit of currency and displaying the second unit of currency.

28. The computer-assisted method of claim 22, further comprising the step of selecting a third-party service provider from a computer database, wherein the third-party service provider is selected from a geographic area to which the sale pertains.

29. The computer-assisted method of claim 28, further comprising the step of electronically transmitting to the third-party service provider a request for services pre-populated with information pertaining to the sale negotiation.

30. The computer-assisted method of claim 29, wherein the third-party service provider is an architect, and wherein the electronically transmitted request pertains to a floor plan for the sale.

31. The computer-assisted method of claim 22, further comprising the step of completing

an evaluation form for the negotiation and generating a report based on the evaluation form.

32. The computer-assisted method of claim 22, further comprising the step of:

(4) in the later negotiation phase, displaying additional computer screens to resolve sale provisions that were deferred from the first negotiation phase.

33. The computer-assisted method of claim 22, further comprising a step of automatically generating an intermediate document that summarizes points of agreement in the negotiation.

34. The computer-assisted method of claim 22, wherein steps (1) and (2) are performed over the Internet using web browsers by negotiators located at two different locations.

35. A system that facilitates the negotiation of a real estate sale between a buyer and a seller, comprising a computer system programmed with software that generates a display of a plurality of sale provisions and a plurality of predefined actions associated with each sale provision, wherein the plurality of sale provisions are associated with a first phase of a sale negotiation;

wherein the software receives choices from the buyer and the seller for each sale provision pertaining to one of the predefined actions and, for each sale provision, determines whether the buyer and seller have indicated agreement and, if so, stores in the computer an indication of the agreed sale provisions and, if not, defers non-agreed sale provisions to a later phase of the sale negotiation.

36. The system of claim 35, wherein the software receives choices from the buyer located at a first computer during a first time period and receives choices from the seller located at a second computer during a second time period.

37. The system of claim 35, wherein the software converts a numerical value relating to one of the sale provisions from a first unit of measure to a second unit of measure.

38. The system of claim 35, wherein the software converts a numerical value relating to one of the sale provisions from a first unit of currency to a second unit of currency.

39. The system of claim 35, wherein the software suggests a third-party service provider from a computer database based on the geographic area of the sale.

40. The system of claim 39, wherein the software electronically transmits to the third-

party service provider a request for services pre-populated with information pertaining to the sale negotiation.

41. The system of claim 35, wherein the software receives evaluation information from the buyer and the seller and generates a report based on the evaluation information.

42. The system of claim 35, wherein the software prompts the buyer and seller to resolve in a later negotiation phase sale provisions that were deferred from an earlier phase.

43. The system of claim 35, wherein the software automatically generates an intermediate document that summarizes points of agreement in the negotiation.

44. A computer-assisted method of negotiating a real estate sale, comprising the steps of:

(1) displaying on a first computer display device a plurality of sale provisions and a plurality of predefined actions associated with each sale provision, and receiving from a first party information selecting one of the predefined actions for each sale provision;

(2) displaying on a second computer display device the plurality of sale provisions and the plurality of predefined actions associated with each sale provision, and receiving from a second party information selecting one of the predefined actions for each sale provision;

(3) determining those sale provisions for which the first and second parties have selected the same predefined action; and

(4) for those sale provisions for which the first and second parties have not selected the same predefined action, prompting the first and second parties to reach agreement.

45. The method of claim 44, wherein step (4) comprises the step of generating a request for services from a local service provider.

46. The method of claim 44, further comprising the step of converting a value associated with one of the sale provisions from a first unit of measure to a second unit of measure and displaying the second unit of measure.

47. The method of claim 44, wherein step (4) comprises the step of suggesting a value for a sale provision that is a compromise between a value offered by the first party and a value offered by the second party.

48. The method of claim 44, further comprising the step of preventing the first party and the second party from modifying any sale provision for which the parties have selected the same

predefined action.

49. A computer-readable medium comprising computer instructions that, when executed by a computer, perform the steps recited in claim 44.

50. A computer-implemented method of generating a report reflecting difficulties

5 encountered during a computer-assisted sale negotiation, comprising the steps of:

(1) displaying on a first computer display device a plurality of sale provisions and a plurality of predefined actions associated with each sale provision, and receiving from a first party information selecting one of the predefined actions for each sale provision;

(2) displaying on a second computer display device the plurality of sale provisions and

10 the plurality of predefined actions associated with each sale provision, and receiving from a second party information selecting one of the predefined actions for each sale provision;

(3) negotiating between the first and second parties to reach agreement on at least one of the sale provisions for which the first and second party did not reach agreement;

(4) receiving from each party an evaluation form including information relating to the

15 sale negotiation process; and

(5) generating a report including information received from the evaluation form.

51. A computer-assisted method of negotiating a real estate sale, comprising the steps of:

(1) displaying on a computer screen a plurality of predefined real estate sale provisions each relating to one aspect of a potential real estate sale agreement, each provision having an

20 associated displayed choice including at least an agreement choice and a deferral choice;

(2) for each of a plurality of negotiators to the real estate agreement, detecting each negotiator's computer selection of one of the plurality of displayed choices for each of the predefined real estate sale agreement provisions;

(3) for each predefined real estate sale agreement provision, determining whether each of

25 the plurality of negotiators has selected the same displayed choice and, for each such same choice, storing in a computer an indication of agreement regarding the associated sale agreement provision.

52. The computer-assisted method of claim 51, wherein step (1) is performed on two computers each located at a different geographic location, wherein each negotiator selects

choices during different time periods.

53. The computer-assisted method of claim 51, wherein steps (1) to (3) are performed during a first negotiation time period, and further comprising the steps of:

(4) during a later negotiation period, re-displaying real estate sale agreement provisions for which agreement was not reached during the first negotiation time period, and repeating steps (2) and (3) for all such provisions.

54. The computer-assisted method of claim 51, wherein step (1) comprises the step of displaying each of the plurality of real estate sale agreement provisions simultaneously on a single computer screen.

55. The computer-assisted method of claim 51, further comprising the step of generating by computer a draft sales agreement containing provisions for which agreement was reached.

56. The computer-assisted method of claim 51, wherein step (1) comprises the step of displaying a plurality of sale provisions including at least a sale price; payment terms; and closing date.

57. The computer-assisted method of claim 15, wherein step (7) comprises the step of generating a summary report that includes the information identifying each transaction on a single line of a multi-line tabular display format.

58. The computer-assisted method of claim 1, wherein the contract relates to a real estate transaction.